

# The Canadian Red Cross Society and the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions

by **Brian Smith**

The Canadian Red Cross Society has strongly supported the adoption of the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 as *logical, essential extensions* of the Conventions. The Protocols bring the Conventions of 1949 up to date. They make the true application of international humanitarian law (IHL) in armed conflicts relevant, meaningful and possible in the modern world to fulfil its ultimate aim—to provide protection and assistance to *all victims of all conflicts*.

The adoption of the Protocols reinforced and enhanced the Society's activities in disseminating more information on international humanitarian law among all Canadians. To this end, the Society has addressed and examined its dissemination activities and is attempting to increase both the "quality and quantity" of this activity, both internally and externally.

## **The Canadian Government**

Since 1977 the Canadian Government has been studying and examining the Protocols with a view to ratification.

An Interdepartmental Committee of the Canadian Government was formed to examine the Protocols and to make recommendations for the Canadian Government to adopt. The Committee's tasks have been completed and its recommendations are currently under review.

## The Canadian Red Cross Society

The Canadian Red Cross has taken every opportunity and situation to encourage the Canadian Government to ratify the Protocols—*in toto* and without reservation.

The Society has undertaken a variety of activities not only to encourage ratification by the government but also to draw attention, to educate and to inform the public about the Geneva Conventions and the Protocols.

In 1985, in co-operation with the Federal Government's Department of the Secretary of State, the Society undertook a mass education programme for secondary school students. This programme, entitled "*What's Fair*", consists of a students' book and an extensive teachers' guide and was distributed to secondary school students across the country.

A nation-wide public awareness programme accompanied the launching and distribution of *What's Fair*.

This programme included: posters, television and radio announcements, public transit posters, extensive mailing to relevant individuals and organizations across the country, presentations (including copies of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols) to provincial Lieutenant Governors and other high-ranking government officials.

*What's Fair* is still in wide-spread use and enjoying a large measure of success.

Both internally and externally every opportunity is used to present information on the Conventions and Protocols. Indeed the Canadian Red Cross Society (CRCS) conducts briefing and training sessions for prospective Canadian Red Cross field delegates in preparation for overseas missions as well as orientation programmes for new Red Cross employees/volunteers.

Wherever and whenever relevant when talking about the Red Cross to the general public and others, explanations of the Conventions and Protocols are made and given to increase understanding and awareness, particularly of the role of the Protocols in the conflicts of the modern world. Guided by this aim, the CRCS disseminates IHL publications and educational resource packages produced by the International Committee of the Red Cross to our Divisions, libraries of schools and universities, medical circles, the Armed Forces, government officials, and the general public. A CRCS volunteer with expertise in IHL participated in the Seminar

on Dissemination for European and North American National Societies June 8-11, 1986, in Vienna.

For many years the CRCS has promoted the IHL course for law students which is held yearly in Warsaw under the joint auspices of the ICRC and the Polish Red Cross. The CRCS contacts major law faculties of several Canadian universities in order to recruit potential candidates for this course.

During the summer of 1985 and 1986 the CRCS provided a Red Cross speaker to the Summer Course on Human Rights which is held by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation every summer at the University of Prince Edward Island and will do so again this year.

In addition to contributing to the two aforementioned courses the CRCS participates and lectures in the annual Basic Law Armed Conflict Course organized by the Judge Advocate General of the Department of National Defence of Canada.

**Brian Smith**

*Volunteer*

*The Canadian Red Cross Society*